Religion in Yugoslavia.

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RELIGION IN YUGOSLAVIA

A report on conferences with Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Moslem, Jewish and Protestant leaders, and investigations through the medium of religious institutions and documents.

YUGOSLAV EMBASSY
WASHINGTON

BY SEVEN AMERICAN PROTESTANT CLERGYMEN
AND EDITORS OF RELIGIOUS JOURNALS
WHO VISITED YUGOSLAVIA
IN THE SUMMER OF 1947

PREFACE

IN presenting this report, we ask our readers to bear certain basic facts in mind. The evidence here set forth, where space does not permit of lengthy quotation from the sustaining documents which are mentioned, is the result of our eye-witness investigation; it is not second-hand.

There was available to us an enormous amount of corroborating evidence, much of it from Americans and others who have lived in Yugoslavia for months or years, which we have not included in this report.

The material on the status of religious life in Yugoslavia in no case came from the government but from personal interviews with leaders of churches in the four republics we visited—Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox, Jewish, Moslem and Protestant. Since we are all clergymen, and three of us editors of religious journals, it was both natural and sound procedure for us to seek our information on religious affairs from leaders in the field of religious life.

We must emphasize in reference to what we say briefly about the case of Archbishop Stepinac that our sources of information were Roman Catholic—the most incriminating documents were the files of the Roman Catholic diocesan newspapers, concerning the authenticity of which there can be no question—and while we found division of opinion among Catholics as to his conviction, many Catholic leaders frankly admitted the truth of the background data.

Certain sections of the press, both in America and in other parts of the world, have charged that we have "whitewashed the Tito government" and have gone so far as to assert that we went to Yugoslavia with that purpose. The

accusation is ludicrous and falls of its own weight, as this report will verify to any intelligent and honest reader. We did not go to Yugoslavia to appraise the Tito government or its policies outside our stated field of interest, and nowhere have we made, as a group, any comments on that government. We went to investigate one thing—the status of religious life in Yugoslavia today. The form of government has no bearing on the facts that we report.

Among other details, the reader will find how our trip came about, how the members of our party were chosen, the degree of freedom of movement that we had, the purpose of our trip, the precise things we saw, and comments by individuals whom we interviewed.

We have concluded with the hope that our investigation and report may cut through some of the ignorance and misrepresentation, and that it will help toward better all around understanding, and thus contribute to that world peace without which civilization is now doomed.

GENESIS OF THE TRIP

Late in October of 1946 the American Committee for Yugoslav Relief gave a dinner at the Hotel Pennsylvania, New York, in honor of the Yugoslav Ambassador, Mr. Sava Kosanovich, who, in his address, discussed the Yugoslavia religious issue. Dr. Shipler, editor of *The Churchman,* attended the dinner as the representative of his paper and sat at the press table. During the evening he talked with Mr. Monroe Stern, the public relations representative of the Yugoslav Embassy in Washington, whom he had not previously met and who was sitting at the same table. In the course of the conversation, Mr. Stern said that he believed the Ambassador would be grateful for an opportunity to meet some of the church leaders of America to whom he might speak freely of religious conditions in Yugoslavia and whose questions he might have the privilege of answering.

As a result of this conversation, letters were sent by Dr. Shipler to a list of clergymen and other church leaders in the New York area, inviting them to a luncheon in November at the Hotel Pierre, New York, to hear the Ambassador and to ask him questions. At this luncheon some thirty Protestant ministers and leaders met with Ambassador Kosanovich, Foreign Minister Simich, and members of the Yugoslav United Nations' delegation. There was opportunity to cross-examine them on the trial of Archbishop Stepinac which had just occurred, and on the general social and religious policies of the new Yugoslav government. At the close of the luncheon, the clergymen expressed the opinion that what had been said at this meeting concerning these matters indicated that there was another side to the picture which had not been adequately presented to the American public, and was far different from that described in the press. As a result of what they had heard, some of the guests at the luncheon felt that it might help to

create better understanding between Yugoslavia and the United States if a group of perhaps ten such representative clergymen as those present could go to Yugoslavia and report their findings.

Trips of this kind are expensive. Few clergymen can afford them, and official church bodies have neither the funds nor the inclination to investigate conditions in countries where they have no direct membership. Any trip, therefore, would have to be at the expense of the Yugoslav government. Precedent for this was established during both World Wars I and II when just such informal groups of religious leaders and editors visited England to report on conditions, and went as the guests of the British Ministry of Information with all expenses paid by the British Government and without any public criticism.

In June of 1947, when relations between the United States and Yugoslavia were at a low point and war-talk was on the increase, following the enunciation of the so-called Truman Doctrine and the virtual black-listing of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav Ambassador asked Dr. Shipler if there were ten representative clergymen who would be willing to visit his country as the guests of the government. When he was told that such a group could be secured, he asked Dr. Shipler to prepare a list of names. One was submitted, with preference given to editors of national religious journals. Political considerations played no part in the selection, as the names of those asked clearly indicates.

WHO WAS ASKED?

Four of those invited could not accept because of prior summer commitments: Dr. Louie Newton, Southern Baptist of Atlanta, Georgia; Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam of the Methodist Church, New York area; Dr. Alva Taylor, Church of the Disciples of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee; and Dr. Carlyle Adams, editor of *The Presbyterian Tribune* of

Brooklyn. A fifth, Paul Hutchinson, editor of *The Christian Century* of Chicago, declined. We cite these names because they refute the charge made in the press that the Yugoslavs asked only "hand-picked" friends. The fact is that the Yugoslav government made no suggestions of names and made no comment on those selected.

Six men accepted: Dr. Shipler, editor of *The Churchman,* an Episcopalian; Dr. Emory Stevens Bucke, editor of *Zion's Herald* of Boston, a Methodist; Dr. George Walker Buckner, Jr., editor of *World Call* of Indianapolis, Disciple of Christ; Dr. Phillips Packer Elliott of the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn, whom Dr. Adams suggested to represent *The Presbyterian Tribune;* Dr. Samuel Trexler, former president, Lutheran Synod of New York; and the Rev. Claude Williams, director of the Institute of Applied Religion in Birmingham, Alabama. To this group was added Dr. Trexler's friend, Dr. Edmund Devol, a New York physician. When Bishop Oxnam and Dr. Newton failed to suggest substitutes, as they had been asked to do, the Rev. William Howard Melish of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Brooklyn, an Episcopalian, was invited by the group.

Sections of the press, both secular and Roman Catholic, have sought to discredit the party by alleging that three of the group are "communists" or "fellow-travelers"—an allegation which our entire group is at one in denying. Those who have made these false charges have said little about the other five men, whose signatures appear on this document. Also they have ignored the additional but significant fact that we were accompanied throughout the trip, as we have publicly stated, by Dr. Jean Nussbaum, a Swiss citizen working out of Paris as General Secretary of the International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty (European Section) with headquarters in Washington, D. C., and cooperating closely with the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights. For thirty years, as a licensed lay preacher, Dr. Nussbaum has been

visiting the trouble-spots of Europe, testing the degree of religious liberty as it concerned Protestant minorities. He has several times visited the Balkans before the war. He joins us in signing this report.

WAS THE TOUR CONDUCTED?

From the moment we met the Yugoslav authorities in Belgrade, we were asked what we wanted to see. Without exception the government made no recommendation. Everything we ultimately did was first proposed by us and then arranged by them, chiefly from day to day. Brevity of time prevented the carrying out of one or two requests; otherwise all of our proposals were met.

We were in Yugoslavia fourteen days. Our hosts had asked us to stay three weeks but our personal obligations made this impossible. Since Yugoslavia is not a large country—approximately the size of Colorado and with a population only twice that of Greater New York City—we felt a fortnight would provide sufficient opportunity to study the one subject we went to Yugoslavia to investigate. We indicated to our hosts that we were prepared to travel night and day without stint, and we did. Since every facility was at our disposal—automobile, boat, train, airplane—we were able to visit four of the six republics that constitute Yugoslavia: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia. At the end, foreign correspondents in Belgrade told us we had seen more in our fourteen days than they had in several months.

Some of the press said, even before we left New York, "You will be on a conducted tour and will see only what they want you to see." We were well aware of that possibility, but it was totally disproved by our experience. With us at all *official* visits and interviews we had as our interpreter a Princeton graduate of the class of 1934, who had lived sixteen years in the United States, had attended Taft school, and worked a year on *Newsweek*.

The two Lutheran clergymen in the pulpit of Christ Lutheran Church in Zagreb are the pastor, the Rev. Edgar Popp, and Dr. Samuel Trexler. (Photo by Dr. Buckner.) At the lower right, Monsignor Dr. Svetozar Ritig, Papal Chamberlain, a representative of Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference, and minister without portfolio in the Croatian government.

The altar in the private chapel, next to the room occupied by Archbishop Stepinac, where he celebrates Mass daily. (Photo by Dr. Buckner.)

At all times, in every section of the country we visited, we were given complete freedom, both as individuals and as a group, to talk to anyone to whom we wished to speak, and to go where we wished, without government representatives present, an opportunity of which we took full advantage. Whenever possible, we talked to the people directly, rather than through an interpreter. Dr. Trexler spoke German, Dr. Nussbaum French, and the rest of us had some knowledge of various languages. Furthermore, many Yugoslavs speak languages other than their own Serbo-Croat; many know German, French and English.

Often we were approached by friendly people on the street with whom we talked freely. We saw no indication of fear or restraint; in fact, there was an atmosphere of self-confidence and optimism, especially among the young people. Often they would ask naively, "What don't you like about us?"

We met the British and American diplomatic representatives without Yugoslavs present, talked with foreign newsmen, and had conversations with the young people from many other countries who were taking part in the voluntary labor projects such as the famous Youth Railway in Bosnia.

Since our return, we have been asked if we experienced any antagonism towards us as Americans. The question at first surprised us. In Yugoslavia we neither anticipated nor found the slightest evidence of inhospitality or lack of cordiality, whether we were meeting officials or people on the street. In fact, quite the opposite was true. Among our most friendly receptions were those given us, in all parts of Yugoslavia, by leaders of the Roman Catholic Church.

Dr. Buckner, Dr. Bucke, Dr. Shipler and Mr. Melish had cameras, as did Joseph Blank, a free-lance correspondent from New York, a friend of one of our group, who joined us in Belgrade and was with us for most of the trip. The only thing we were asked not to photograph was the outer approach

to Lepoglava Prison but we were permitted to take our cameras with us when we entered. No objection was voiced when we took pictures of Archbishop Stepinac in his room, as well as photos of his private chapel next to his room. Though among us we took nearly 1000 shots, we were not asked to have our photographs developed before leaving the country. In fact, with the single exception of Lepoglava, no reference was made to our cameras, which we carried everywhere we went, whether alone or in a group.

PURPOSE AND RESULT OF THE TRIP

The principal objective of the journey was to study the state of religious worship and to determine the truth of the blanket accusations against Yugoslavia concerning particularly the case of Archbishop Stepinac, which have been in circulation in the United States and have done so much to damage our relationship and thereby endanger world peace. In line with our main enquiry, we are enabled to make the following specific statements:

We saw ministers of religion and members of religious orders, both monks and nuns, going about the streets in their various religious habits. We visited some of the many monasteries which exist in large numbers and are functioning normally —both Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic.

Wherever we went throughout the four republics we visited, we found the churches of all faiths open and functioning. People were using them in large numbers with as much freedom as we take for granted in America. Some rural parishes are without resident priests, since many were killed in the war and the seminaries have not yet supplied sufficient ordinands to fill the gaps. But we found no churches closed.

We attended many services both as a group and individually—in all, about fifty during our fortnight. For example, on our Sunday in Belgrade most of the group attended services

in several different churches in succession, and on a Thursday morning in Zagreb similarly visited seven or eight churches where masses were being celebrated, one a patronal high mass.

We interviewed priests, both Orthodox and Catholic, some of whom were holding high government posts. Among these were, in the Republic of Serbia, Father Smilyanich, who is the Vice President of the Presidium; Father Stamenich, a member of the Commission on Social Welfare; and an inactive priest Vlado Sechevich, a former Chetnik who is now the Minister of New Construction; and in the Republic of Croatia, Monsignor Dr. Svetozar Ritig, Minister without Portfolio and Chairman of the Commission on Religious affairs.

We visited the impressive Zagreb University Hospital, a state-operated institution, finished in 1939, and found that 90% of the nurses were Roman Catholic nuns working in their religious habit. By agreement with the church authorities, they were in every department except gynecology, venereal disease and skin ailments. They had their own dormitory and dining room. There was a resident Roman Catholic priest as the hospital chaplain, and a chapel in the building was at his disposal.

While we found separation of church and school, we were officially informed that priests of all faiths can enter the schools during the school hours and give religious instruction to such children as have obtained parental consent. We saw no evidence, and we heard no complaints at any time, that the government was conducting any anti-religious campaigns or educational propaganda. There is no ban on parochial schools. Before a new one can be opened the educational standards established by the state must be assured.

As to taxation, we found the same general principle in application that we accept in the United States; property used for worship is tax-free; income-producing property is taxable.

We visited and interviewed at length the Serbian Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Belgrade,

having a particularly satisfactory talk with the Vice Rector, Dr. Dushan Glunac, and with the Professor of Theology, Dr. A. Anastasievich. Their dormitory for students and their library were bombed during the war, and they are experiencing great difficulty in housing their 135 current students. The government is giving them new furniture and has promised them a new dormitory in the near future.

We similarly visited and interviewed the Roman Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Zagreb, being received with genuine hospitality by the Rector, Dr. Janko Oberski. Two hundred and seventeen seminarians were registered in the spring term just ended. In both these institutions we found the appointment of the professors in the hands of the state which follows the nominations of the faculties concerned. The salaries of the professors are paid by the state, as are those of professors in the other academic fields. We were given the full curriculum in each school, were taken through the library, and our questions were answered freely and in the most friendly spirit.

While we were on our way to Yugoslavia, the Roman Catholic Cardinal of Westminster, London, was quoted in British papers as stating that the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia was not allowed to have theological or devotional books printed in that country. We made inquiry of the Rector of this Roman Catholic Theological Faculty who showed us books printed in the State Publishing House (owned and operated by the Yugoslav government). We brought back to the United States with us many copies of Roman Catholic catechisms, service books, devotional works and theological treatises bearing the State Publishing House imprint and the dates: 1945, 1946 and 1947.

In addition to Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic representatives, we sought out other religious groups. Among our most informing conversations were those with the Chief Rabbi of Zagreb, Dr. Henri Urbach, and the Deputy Chairman

of the Jewish Community in Belgrade, Dr. Benzion Levi; with Lutheran Pastor Edgar Popp in Zagreb; with Bishop Agoston Sandor of the Hungarian Reformed Church; with Mohamid Ridranovich, head of the Moslem Community in Sarajevo, and Dr. Kamliv, president of the Sarajevo Jewish Community. Through these men we asked about not only their own religious groups but also the status of others, such as the Methodists, Baptists, Nazarenes, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Salvation Army. All of these groups were at work—the Baptists having literature tables on street corners. Where faced with war-damaged buildings or unusual conditions, they were receiving or had been promised government assistance. This assistance is handled by a Commission on Religious Affairs in each republic, on which sit representatives of the main denominational groups in that area. The constitution makes provision ultimately for a Federal Commission on Religious Affairs but none has as yet been appointed or elected.

All of those to whom we spoke attested to the genuine equality of all religious groups in the new Yugoslavia. The Protestants in particular commended their current status as a distinct improvement for them; in the past they were small minorities surrounded by Roman Catholics in Croatia and Slovenia, and Serbian Orthodox in Serbia.

In Zagreb we interviewed Lutheran Pastor Edgar Popp, an attractive young man, whom we found sitting in his study beneath a bust of Martin Luther. He told us of his heavy responsibilities connected with caring for sixteen Protestant communities, some of them as much as two hundred miles from Zagreb. "Before the war," he said, "the evangelical churches were sometimes oppressed by the Roman Catholics; now there is religious liberty." He spoke of the need for books and vestments. We visited the church of which he is pastor, where we all bowed in prayer as Dr. Trexler, the Lutheran member of our group, asked God's blessing upon these congregations.

Pastor Popp expressed gratitude to the government for postponing his period of military service on two occasions so that he might continue with his people; also for the additional financial assistance he is receiving from the state to help him meet the heavy travel expenses involved in ministering to sixteen scattered congregations. He showed us photographs of his young people, and spoke with pride of the successful vacation-time conference he had just enjoyed with them.

Further contact with Protestant groups came on our final day in Belgrade, when members of the Seventh Day Adventists and the Nazarenes joined us at dinner, as did Bishop Agoston Sandor of Feketich-Bachka, a leader of the Hungarian Reformed Church. He had driven sixty miles in a jeep, from his parish near the Hungarian border, that he might be with us.

Since he spoke only Magyar, an added interpreter was called in, and we conversed from English to Serbian to Magyar, and back again. He told us of the 40,000 members of his church in Yugoslavia, a strictly peasant people. They "feel very well here" and the villagers "go to church as much or more than before the war," he said. They need more ministers and, having no theological school within Yugoslavia, have received permission from the government to send their young men outside of the country for theological study, chiefly to their seminary at Cluj in Roumania. We had heard previously from the Serbian Orthodox that they also had a limited number of such students studying at seminaries in Greece, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union.

The Jews, whose treatment during the war was lamentable and whose present state is still pitiable, spoke with confidence of their status under the new government.

At the close of the farewell dinner in Belgrade, Dr. Shipler asked Benzion Levi, Deputy Chairman of the Jewish Religious Community, a fellow-guest at the dinner, if he would write a message to his Jewish friends in the United States

which the editor of *The Churchman* could bring back to this country. He readily consented, and wrote the following: "As a representative of the Jews of Yugoslavia, I am happy that I am able to send my greetings to all our friends in America, with the wish that we may proceed, with all our ability, with work for the benefit of human society, for the closer relationship between all men of goodwill, and for eternal peace between nations."

We were told by these clergymen of various faiths that the government was giving direct financial assistance in many ways. The Roman Catholic dioceses were receiving help for the rebuilding of war damaged cathedrals and churches. The City Council of Dubrovnik has justed voted 1,000,000 dinars (about $20,000 at current exchange) to put the 135 Roman Catholic churches in that ancient tourist city in better condition; the Jewish Community in Zagreb had been promised help in building a synagogue to replace the fine old structure torn down by the Germans during the occupation; and the Lutheran Pastor was receiving the already mentioned travel supplement to his salary which is paid by his own congregation.

So numerous were these items of government assistance that they indicated a general policy of help to the churches of all faiths, at the same time that the principle of separation of church and state is observed.

Others we interviewed were the Roman Catholic priests, Father Cajnkar, chairman of the Religious Affairs Committee of Slovenia, and Father Franc Finzgar, perhaps Slovenia's most distinguished author. Also the Franciscan monk, Father Bono Ostojich, representative of the Religious Affairs Committee of Bosnia-Herzegovina who said: "As representatives of the American churches you love freedom. I want to say that the people of Yugoslavia love freedom just as much or more. The United States helped us greatly in a struggle in which we won freedom—which we mean to defend at all cost. Take this message to the United States."

(NOTE: We regretted that we were unable to secure an interview with Bishop Hurley, the Vatican representative in Yugoslavia. When we telephoned his secretary for an appointment we were told that the bishop was out of town.)

It was not our purpose to pass judgment on the political forms or economic policies of the new Yugoslav government but, since social problems are the concern of the clergy in America, we wished to see what the general attitude of the government was towards the incapacitated and handicapped. We found the Yugoslav social program providing the best available care and instruction for the blind, the large number of deaf-mutes in the country, and, particularly, the 200,000 war orphans. We visited nine institutions of varying character in the social service field. We found them exemplifying a high degree of social concern for human beings. In the great youth projects it seemed to us that high standards of discipline and morality were being maintained and encouraged.

On the road from Zagreb to Lepoglava Prison, where we went to see Archbishop Stepinac, we passed a religious procession of peasants making its way along a country road. They were carrying a large processional cross and religious banners. On the way back from the prison by another road, we came upon hundreds of peasants afoot and in wagons, most of them in holiday attire. We found later on the road that they were congregating in vast throngs at the country's leading Roman Catholic shrine, Sveta Marija Bistritza, a sort of Yugoslav Lourdes or Ste. Anne de Beaupre, where we spent more than an hour.

In the village square, where the handsome church with its surrounding chapels is located, there were scores of booths selling religious art objects, devotional materials, toys and refreshments. There were also merry-go-rounds and mechanical contrivances for amusement. It was like an American street fair.

While staying at the Hotel Esplanade in Zagreb—owned and operated by the state—we talked with several of the seventy

or more Serbian Orthodox priests from all parts of the Republic of Croatia who were gathered there for a convention.

By asking questions of religious leaders at many points, we were satisfied that the trials of individual clergymen or monks which have taken place are individual cases in which collaboration with the enemy, or acts of sabotage against the government, have been involved. They do not in any way represent persecution of religious groups. On the contrary, we met clergymen who had carried on their religious duties during the period of the German and Italian occupation, who could properly be classified as "minor collaborators." They were suffering no penalties of any sort. Roman Catholic authorities themselves confirmed this openly. Monsignor Ritig stated flatly, "The government has acted only against *serious* collaborators."

(NOTE—With respect to these acts of sabotage, it should be said that sporadic incidents of violence are still occurring, and account for some of the police precautions which we witnessed. Much was made in certain sections of the unfriendly foreign press, and in some American journals, about the time we made our trip, over the execution of two monks after a public trial. It was stated that they were condemned to death simply "because they had criticized the Tito government." Since some newspapers commented on our trip in connection with this assertion, we present the following statement for whatever it may be worth:

An American correspondent who covered the trial told us that the two men were convicted of participation in the bombing of a Zagreb textile factory in which three workers were killed and much valuable machinery destroyed (textiles being the worst bottleneck and shortage in the country). He said that the nine persons involved had incriminated each other, and that the evidence produced by the prosecutor indicated that the parts of the bomb had been smuggled in from abroad, the transaction involving American dollars. He added that

there were found in the possession of the nine individuals concerned in the crime, copies of an American Croatian language paper printed in Chicago, containing, among other items, articles written by Archbishop Stepinac's secretary, Dr. Stjepan Lackovich, who is now in the United States. This same secretary issued a press release condemning the truth of our Belgrade statement on freedom of worship.)

We had a one hour interview with Marshal Josip Broz-Tito at his summer home in Bled. We asked him many questions concerning the relations of church and state. The group had no discussion before the interview as to what questions would be asked. The entire interview, including both our questions and his answers, was taken down stenographically. It later appeared in the major newspapers of the entire country, in most cases on the front page.

In every part of the country we were received by the leaders of all churches with genuine courtesy and friendliness. Perhaps the happiest of all these experiences occurred in Zagreb when we met Monsignor Doctor Svetozar Ritig, a Papal Chamberlain, a representative of Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference, and Minister without portfolio in the Croatian government. As a young man he was secretary of the distinguished Roman Catholic leader, Archbishop Strossmayer. During the days of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, he was one of the first and strongest advocates of a Yugoslav state. For many years he was pastor of St. Mark's parish church in Zagreb, one of the most beautiful churches, we all agreed, we had seen any place in the world. Its altar sculpture was the work of Mestrovich (now teaching at Syracuse University) and its new historical murals the work of Kljakovich. When the Italians and Germans set up the quisling Independent State of Croatia, Monsignor Ritig, at the age of seventy, left Zagreb, and from then on served with the Partisan Movement. Today he is clearly among the first citizens of the new Yugoslavia.

After our interview with him, he gave us a gracious invitation to dine with him at his home the following evening.

Commenting on the religious conditions in the country, he said: "Things are not as they are printed in a section of the Roman Catholic press abroad. The separation of church and state has caused much feeling. The state, however, is giving the church large amounts for reconstruction, and is also helping the theological seminaries. Real life is bringing all religious groups together. Reality is proving stronger than theory. People's priests should not abandon but stay close to the people."

At the close of the evening together he brought out a large and valuable 16th Century volume, which he is planning to bequeath, along with other historical documents, to the University of Zagreb. He asked us to sign our names on the fly-leaf beneath the following inscription which he composed after long thought: "This book will go from hand to hand through many generations. Having shown to our American friends this document which shows how the Italian Jesuit theologians established that the Yugoslavs are one people with their own language and with the same faith, but with two churches; and having established that fact, we write our names on these pages in order to enhance their value. So, the war being over, while we sit together in this fellowship, we jointly pledge ourselves to work among our people and in our churches for brotherhood, love and peace in the world. Zagreb, 31 July 1947."

This welcome, so warmly expressed by Monsignor Ritig, was duplicated at Ljubljana and at Sarajevo, where Roman Catholic priests were among the committees which met us at the station. Amidst the dust and din, they delivered formal addresses of welcome to which an equally formal response was made. At Sarajevo the Franciscan monk, Fra Bono Ostojich, in his brown habit, added to the variety of these experiences, as did the Moslem leader of that 40% Mussulman city. We felt a strong bond of interfaith understanding and sympathy in these gatherings, both between the local religious personalities, and towards the American Protestant visitors. Especially was this true in Sarajevo's Hotel Europe where, at a formal dinner,

addresses were made not only by government officials but by the Franciscan friar, the Moslem leader, Mohamed Ridranovich, the Orthodox priest, Dr. Jankovich, and the president of the Jewish Congregation, Dr. Kamliv. As Dr. Jean Nussbaum, who knows Europe so well, commented, this atmosphere of religious tolerance and cooperation is something new to the Balkans and an innovation not to be dismissed as unimportant.

It was these and many other experiences during our fortnight in Yugoslavia that led us to assert, in a brief statement given out at a foreign correspondents' press conference in Belgrade, that in our opinion "there is today in Yugoslavia complete freedom of worship and respect for religious beliefs and institutions."

We are American clergymen with deep convictions on the social implications of the Gospel of Jesus. Accordingly, there is one important aspect of the question of religious liberty about which we wish we felt more certain—both in Yugoslavia and elsewhere. We refer to the freedom of the church to criticize and to speak out prophetically on questions of national welfare. We are not convinced that the churches in Yugoslavia can claim this right *or that they have wanted it.* Even in America this right is questioned by many who dub as "political" all pronouncements by the church in the field of social welfare. In Yugoslavia, where churches have traditionally had scant interest in such questions and too much interest in their own maneuvering for special privilege, it is not surprising that the government should insist that they "keep out of politics." The present questions concerning freedom of the church in Yugoslavia to criticize would be more to the point if the churches there had a better record in the matter of standing up for human rights in the days of collaboration with Hitler and Hitler's puppets.

Furthermore, it is essential to remember, as churchmen said to us, that two years after a devastating war, the relationship of the church to the state in Yugoslavia is going through

a process of readjustment. The separation of church and state is something new in the life of that country, though familiar enough in America. Obviously, economic and other factors make adjustment difficult and not always pleasing to church leaders trained under the old tradition.

ARCHBISHOP STEPINAC

Soon after our arrival in Yugoslavia we asked if we might visit Archbishop Stepinac who had been sentenced to sixteen years at hard labor in prison on charges of collaboration with the enemy in the war. Emotions nurtured by that trial are still running strong in Roman Catholic circles. Before we left America, our delegation had been sent copies of the *Catholic Universe Bulletin* of Cleveland, Ohio, which, among other charges, said that Stepinac "is at present, according to our best information, slowly starving on an inadequate diet." Also, on the weekend in which we entered Yugoslavia, Cardinal Griffin of Westminster, in the same public address to which we have already alluded in the previous section, charged the Yugoslav government with starving and working the Archbishop to death in prison.

Such rumors and accusations have been helping to increase the tension between the United States and Yugoslavia, and to heighten the discord between East and West. If they were true, we wished to know that fact; our group believed that if they were not true, the general public should be so informed in behalf of better international relations.

Lepoglava Prison was little different from any penitentiary in the United States. There were sentry-boxes and tommy-guns along the wall, exactly like Sing Sing Prison at Ossining, New York.

When we filed into Stepinac's special room—not in the main cellblock or actually a cell, but adjoining the warden's office—we found an immaculate whitewashed room about

twelve to fifteen feet square, flooded with sunlight from two windows. We were frankly surprised to find the Archbishop not in prison stripes but wearing his cassock. He was standing by a small table in the center of the room. On it was a portable typewriter at which he apparently had been working when we interrupted him. He was engaged in typing a commentary on the Old Testament in the Croatian language. Against the wall, opposite the table, were bookshelves in which were perhaps fifty reference and theological volumes.

Before visiting the prison, we had agreed among ourselves that since our primary purpose was to ascertain the truth or falsity of the rumors about his treatment and consequent condition, we would not ask him about his trial, unless he himself initiated the subject. At first he was reluctant to answer questions addressed to him through the interpreter but said that if one of our group would speak to him in French, German or Italian, he would reply. Two members of our group then asked him the questions on which we had agreed, in German and in French. Asked whether the food was satisfactory, he said, "The food is very good." Concerning his physical condition, he replied, "I have been blessed with good health all the time I have been here." (The two medical men, who were members of our party, agreed that his appearance gave direct confirmation to his answer).

In reply to another question, he said, "I celebrate Mass every day. It is my greatest consolation." When Dr. Nussbaum introduced himself as representing his organization, speaking in French, and asked Stepinac if there were any restrictions on his religious liberty in prison, he answered, "No, there are no restrictions." Dr. Nussbaum added: "And do you have religious books?" To this Stepinac replied: "I have the Bible in Latin and in Croatian, and I have other religious books." As we were leaving, he said, "I thank you for your visit." Stepinac made no objection to being photographed by our members.

After leaving Stepinac, we were shown into a room next door, which was fitted up as his private chapel. There was a fully equipped altar of dark wood. This also was photographed by members of our group.

We left the prison convinced by what we had just seen and heard that the charges of "starvation" and "hard labor"—when one weighs the implications of those words in the public mind as they have to do with prison sentences—are unfounded. To persist in spreading such charges is to seek deliberately to damage relations between Yugoslavia and the United States, and to endanger world peace.

The American public has little understanding of why Stepinac was arrested and convicted, due to lack of adequate information in the American press.

The conviction of Stepinac was based on nearly a thousand photographs and documents submitted to the court and shown to the reporters present, as well as the testimony of many witnesses. In considering the Stepinac trial, it is essential to keep in mind that his trial and conviction were in fact the prosecution of an individual charged with serious collaboration with the enemy of his country; they had nothing to do with any persecution of his own church or religion.

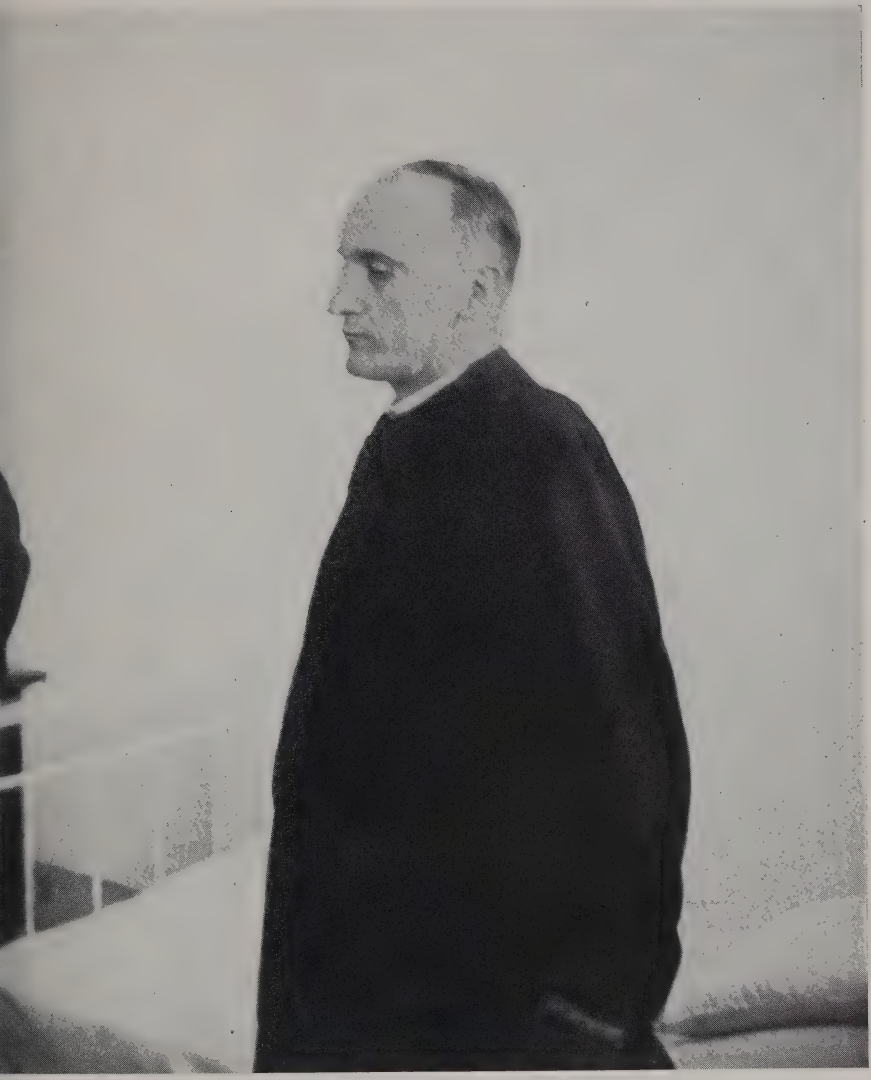
Among the documents we examined were great numbers of official Roman Catholic newspapers and periodicals frankly telling the story from month to month, of the Archbishop's collaboration with the Nazi forces. It seemed obvious that the reason for this candid recording of such collaboration was due to the conviction that Germany would win the war.

WHAT THE DOCUMENTS SHOWED

The documents show that when the Italians and Germans swept into Yugoslavia, underground bands of previously organized Roman Catholic laymen, calling themselves "Crusaders," and aided by individual priests and militant

monks, rose to receive the invaders. Two men responsible for the assassination of King Alexander at Marseilles in 1934 and since that time harbored by Mussolini in Italy for this very occasion, Ante Pavelich (convicted for this crime both in French and Yugoslav courts) and Zlatko Kvaternik, were brought into the country to become the puppet President and the military commander of a quisling government to be called "The Independent State of Croatia." This move was greeted by the Roman Catholic diocesan press in Zagreb as the establishment of a Catholic state on the corporative pattern advocated in the Papal Encyclicals; it was praised without qualification as the church's bulwark against "atheistic materialism." The church leaders apparently were not restrained by the fact that a Yugoslav government was legally in existence and that remnants of its army were still fighting.

Pavelich and Kvaternik, with the help of their German, Italian and "Crusader" soldiers, proceeded to carry out the German-sponsored racial program which advocated the solidifying of a Croatian community by eliminating such minorities as the Jews and Gypsies, reducing the number of Serbs living in Croatia, and compelling those remaining to turn Roman Catholic. Nearly 70,000 of the 80,000 Jews in the entire country were killed or forced to flee, their property being confiscated. 240,000 Serbs became Byzantine Rite Roman Catholics through forced conversions, on pain of death. Those who resisted were shot or stabbed and their bodies thrown into mass-graves which were subsequently found and opened. We saw hundreds of sworn depositions attesting to these crimes, made out by relatives or eye-witnesses, and also, in a few cases, by survivors. Serbian church properties were seized and turned over to Roman Catholic parishes and convents. Documents requesting, and authorizing, such transfers are now in the State Prosecutor's offices at Zagreb and Sarajevo, bearing the personal signatures of Archbishop Stepinac of Zagreb and Archbishop Sharich of Sarajevo.



Archbishop Stepinac in his room at Lepoglava prison. The photograph was made by Dr. Buckner following the interview with the Archbishop.

At the top, the Rev. Edgar Popp with a group of his young people gathered for youth conference. (Photo presented by Mr. Popp.) Below, Government officials of th Republic of Serbia who entertained the American visitors at luncheon at Avala, ju outside Belgrade. Three of the men, the two in vestments and the man in the cente are Serbian Orthodox priests. Father Stamenich (2nd. from left) is a member of th Commission for Social Affairs; Valado Zechevich (center) an inactive priest an former Chetnik, is now Minister of New Construction; Father Smilyanich (right) leader of the Serbian Agrarian Party and head of the Association of Cooperative

Roman Catholics who resisted or seriously denounced those activities were hounded, and the braver among them (including many priests such as Monsignor Ritig) fled to the mountains and joined the Partisan Movement. Such men are today honored in the new government and entrusted with responsible posts. We talked with such Roman Catholic leaders, and they confirmed the truth of the historical facts. These things happened in the diocese of which Aloysius Stepinac was the metropolitan—in the Roman Catholic Church the supreme and responsible authority—and furthermore, he actually served as the Military Vicar of the Ustashi armed forces which perpetrated the worst excesses, though, according to certain Roman Catholic journals, he personally counseled moderation.

So confident were these Croat leaders that Hitler's "New Order" would survive, that they preserved the records of their own crimes. When the collapse finally came—it was relatively sudden in Croatia—these state documents were taken for safe keeping to Stepinac's palace in the Kaptol in Zagreb and he gave a personal receipt (which we saw) for their security. A number of boxes of Ustashi loot, consisting of gold watches, rings, bracelets and even dentures torn from the mouths of victims, were found buried under the chancel of the Franciscan Monastery a block from Stepinac's cathedral. If one reads the record of the trial, which members of our group have done, one will find that the Abbot of the Monastery admitted the facts but denied personal responsibility because he was acting on the orders of his superiors, whom he refused to name. Stepinac, in turn, claimed he was not responsible for the acts of his subordinates.

In the total struggle in Yugoslavia 1,700,000 men, women and children perished. A great number of these were victims of a combination of the Italians and Nazis along with fanatical Catholic Croats who were determined to set up a Catholic corporative state on the pattern of Spain under Franco, Italy under Mussolini, and Slovakia under the aegis of Hitler.

At his trial, Stepinac did not deny the truth of the material evidence produced by the state—the photographs, the personally signed documents, and the sworn depositions—but reserved his defense until near the close of the trial. At this point he tried to show that he had protested the excesses, and that his position was morally inviolate because he had acted in the interests of a Catholic Croatia against the threat of Communism.

It is perhaps important to note that the government did not bring this legal action against Stepinac until six months after the termination of the war. Instead, seeking to avoid a trial, it requested the transfer of the Archbishop by the Vatican, and Marshal Tito told us that he in person made this request of the Papal Legate, Bishop Hurley of St. Augustine, Florida, an American Citizen representing the papal state at the capital of another foreign state. It was when the Vatican, after four months, had made no reply to this request, and when the government obtained evidence that the Archbishop was not only persisting in his former loyalties but was secretly blessing banners for underground Ustashi formations intended to operate against the new government,—only then were the legal proceedings begun and the full record of the Archbishop's wartime collaboration exposed.

ORTHODOX AND MOSLEM COLLABORATION

Lest there be any belief that this conflict involved only Roman Catholics, with a division of loyalty among both priests and people, we wish to emphasize that a similar taking of sides occurred among the Serbian Orthodox and the Moslem population.

With the emergence of the Partisan Movement, the Serbian Chetniks began more and more to collaborate with the enemy and to fight their own kin. The Serbian higher clergy, assisted and influenced from outside the country, tended

to side with conservative political elements and to foster monarchist sentiments. The new People's Front did not appeal to them.

When we visited the magnificent building belonging to the Patriarchate in Belgrade with its lovely Byzantine chapel, its grand refectory and a throneroom fit for a king, we sensed why the new People's Authority would be hard for such old-school ecclesiastics to accept. The lower clergy and many of the bishops, who judged political developments from a broad national viewpoint and gave their personal loyalties in terms of the groups that actively engaged the national enemy—the Italians and Germans—seem solidly behind the government, and not a few of them now hold office in it. At the Orthodox headquarters we talked with several Orthodox priests and a bishop. When, before we visited the headquarters, we asked for the privilege of interviewing the Patriarch at the same time, we were told that he was not well and was resting at a mountain resort.

Among the Mohammedan population in Bosnia, during the course of the occupation, there turned up the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, El Hussein, who spent a week in Sarajevo and blessed the formation of a Hanjuk ("Long Knife") Division of SS troops of Mohammedan persuasion. Little by little, as the Partisans grew in strength, these Moslem units came over to their side. In the last few months the Mohammedan Congress has voted full support of the new government.

BEGINNINGS OF TOLERANCE

Dr. Nussbaum, who had been in Yugoslavia several times between World Wars I and II, expressed frank amazement at the present cooperation among the various religious groups in the country, and between them and the government. He reminded us again and again of the traditional bitter conflict between these ancient communions. His astonishment was shared by all of us when we dined in several cities

with Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox, Jewish, Mohammedan and Protestant leaders together around the table. That would be an achievement here in America; in the Balkans it is almost millennial.

There is in Yugoslavia today a genuine equality of religion before the law and the beginnings of a true tolerance.

Of course, only two and a half years after a terrible war, there are tension points yet to be resolved, with the possibility of occasional outbreaks of violence, just as there were in the young United States toward Tory clergymen and laymen of the Church of England following the American Revolution. But the basic patterns seem sound, and the door seems open to a religious peace such as the Balkans have never known in the past.

It appeared to us that the majority of laymen and priests whom we met, apart from the older irreconciliables and those under direct foreign orders, are determined to help build a united post-war nation without foreign interference, either political or clerical, and with full freedom internally on a basis of legal equality. The Protestant ministers whom we interviewed said frankly that they have today a security which in the past they never enjoyed as a small minority in a Roman Catholic Croatia and an Orthodox Serbia.

In view of the old divisiveness which wrecked the Balkans, it is not difficult to understand the bitterness felt by the new Yugoslav generation against any churchmen who seek to resurrect the old Croat or Serbian nationalism, or ecclesiastical conflicts. That way, to them, lies death; in "unity and brotherhood"—their national slogan—they see life.

OUR WITNESS

The members of our deputation are all men who have given their lives to the Christian ministry and to the extension of the Christian church. Wherever there is irreligion, wherever religious freedom is endangered or denied, we are as

quick as any to take alarm and to oppose. Our Protestant heritage is one of freedom, and we cherish that freedom beyond all else.

It is because we have found this fundamental freedom—freedom of worship—existing in Yugoslavia that we are able to bring back so encouraging a report. It will be only by the sympathetic understanding and support of the constructive attributes in the life of the nations of Eastern Europe that the gulf between our life and theirs can be bridged, and a final world war prevented.

Emory Stevens Bucke *
George Walker Buckner, Jr.
Phillips Packer Elliott
William Howard Melish
Guy Emery Shipler
Samuel Trexler
Claude Williams

The two laymen who accompanied those whose names are signed above, join in endorsing this report.

Edmund Devol, M.D.
Jean Nussbaum, M.D.

Note: *The signers of this report regret that its publication was delayed, because there was no opportunity of preparing it in Yugoslavia, because three of the group visited other parts of Europe after leaving Yugoslavia, and because the members of the group live in different parts of the United States.*

* Since Dr. Bucke was present only at the first study of documents in Zagreb, and could not be present at later studies or at the interview with Stepinac, he has signed all sections of this report except that dealing with the Stepinac case.

"Everywhere we found freedom of worship. Even in Yugoslavia, where some Catholic leaders like Monsignor Stepinac were convicted of collaboration with the Nazis, churches were open and crowded. In Poland and Hungary religious instruction by priests is still compulsory in state schools. Nowhere has there been an official attempt to prevent people from worshipping as they please."—*Walter Kerr, Ned Russell, Russell Hill and William Attwood, Foreign correspondents of the New York Herald-Tribune, who surveyed the other side of "The Iron Curtain." —Herald-Tribune, Oct. 10, 1947.*

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